

AMTRAK: ACELA HIGH SPEED RAIL SERVICE

# DESIGNING THE TRANSITION FROM OPERATIONS FOCUS TO SERVICE FOCUS



Ridership rose **200%** within 6 months

of Acela's introduction. The service is generating the largest profits in Amtrak's history.

## Problem

Amtrak provides passenger rail services in the USA. Subsidized by Congress, Amtrak had operated in the red since its inception, with costs always outstripping revenues. A big modernisation effort on its Northeast corridor, connecting Boston, New York and Washington, was seen to be the solution to pull the corporation from the brink of insolvency.

Amtrak was to invest 3 Billion USD in new train equipment, track improvements, electrification of rail lines and refurbishment of stations. The need to provide the service with a coherent identity that could be applied across all of its initiatives was paramount.

First, a design-focused management strategy was needed that would galvanize Amtrak's senior management team around a vision for a new service. Second, that vision needed to be communicated and shared with all managers and suppliers, enabling the entire organization to transition from being operations driven to being service led.

## Solution

Working closely with the senior management team, the design team helped to build a tangible vision, visualizing a series of ideas that embodied the look and feel of the overall service concept. This, in turn, laid the groundwork for the specific service elements to be developed, within a framework dubbed "The Seamless Journey". From here, the design team established a series of design studios with the various equipment suppliers to the programme in order to execute and implement the coherent service vision, dubbed "Acela".

## Impact

Amtrak was able to offer an integrated passenger service through an organization clear in its objectives and capable with its tools. Ridership increased twofold within six months of service introduction. Amtrak's Acela service is now poised to generate a \$2 million profit – the largest in Amtrak history.

See casestudy online  
[Amtrak](#)



## TRANSFORMING OPERATION INTO SERVICES

- Build a service vision with senior management
- Share that vision with entire Amtrak organisation
- Understand passenger needs through primary research
- Co-create solutions with service personnel
- Execute and implement the design of the service

